



presents

The Harp Speaks



Camila Parias, soprano
Ged Owen, actor
Christa Patton, harp
Dongmyung Ahn, vielle
Deborah Fox, lute

March 12, 2023 | 4:00 pm
Downtown United Presbyterian Church, Rochester, NY

The Harp Speaks

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La harpe de melodie Jacob Senleches

Le dit de la harpe: Guillaume de Machaut

Je puis trop bien Guillaume de Machaut
De ce fol penser P. de Molins

Good nature & Loyalty

Belle, bonne, sage Baude Cordier

Kindness & Humility

Plus dure que un diamant Machaut

Honesty & Truth

Trouvere melody Anon. 13th c.

Charity & Pity

Dame di qui toute ma joye vient Machaut

Youth, Pleasure & Gaiety

Gais et jolis, lies, chantans et joieus Machaut

Nobility, Sincerity & Gentility, Wealth & Generosity

Lamento di Tristano/Rotta Anon. 14th c.

Simplicity, Dread of doing wrong, Shame, Love

Honte, paour, doubtance de meffaire Machaut

Judgment, Knowledge, Grace, Bearing, Style, Honor, Sense

Pour le default du noble dieu Bacchus Baude Cordier

Reason & Measure

Indescorte Anon. Codex Faenza

Beauty

Dame Souvrayne Matheus de Perusio

Hope

En attendant Senleches

Program Notes

Our program today celebrates the harp in the 14th century through the works of brilliant harpist-composers such as Baude Cordier and Jacob Senleches as well as the poetry and music of the great

Guillaume de Machaut. His allegorical poem entitled *Le dit de la harpe* serves as the framework upon which our musical selections are fastened. In it Machaut (the voice of the poet) compares the fine qualities of his lady to each of the 29 strings of the harp. In doing so he points out interesting details of the harp itself but also supplies us with a working list of the celebrated and sought-after qualities in a lover that are found throughout the oeuvre of 14th century love poetry.

As part of the flourishing of chivalry in the 12th century, and its subsequent stylization in the 14th century, the harp was as useful to a knight in the art of courtly love as were his sword and shield on the battlefield. Examples range from old French romance heroes such as Tristan in *Tristan en prose* (13th century) and Horn in the *Roman de Horn* (c. 1170), who used it to convey chivalric eloquence, to real composers of the highest degree such as Jacob Senleches, for whom it served as a tool for composing great works.

In French medieval chivalric fiction, the harp was a device used by powerful lords to convey their intentions. In these tales, harpists were emissaries skilled in the art of chivalry. Often journeying in a foreign land, concealing their identity as an agent of their patron, they would reach a court and distinguish themselves by playing the harp or *harping a lay*, and consequently winning the love of the king's daughter for their lord. These harpists were heroes in this 11th and 12th century literature. They had sex appeal not only from the standpoint of physical beauty, as was the case of Horn:

(as seen by men:) "He has thrown back his great marten-fur from his neck and is left standing in his under-tunic of silk, his eyes are flashing and his face is haughty. His body is fair and his sides are broad. He was so fine that all his peers watch him."

(as seen by ladies:) "...he has long blonde hair so that none can equal him; he has blue eyes, large, sweet and laughing to look upon ladies; he has a fine nose and mouth to give kisses."

but they also had true skill on the harp, as well as courtly behavior, that distinguished them from the working minstrels who harped in the court's employ. In the South German romance of *Ruodlieb* (c. 1050), the hero-harpist exhibits all the qualities of the chivalric warrior which, with the strength of his commitment to polite social skills and his mastery of the harp, cause his mistress to languish in love for him:

Meanwhile, Ruodlieb and his nephew go with the mistress to where the harpers are playing. When Ruodlieb heard how badly he played the melody (though that harpist was the best pupil of the art among them) he said to the mistress: 'if there had been another harp here...' 'There is,' she said, 'a harp here, and there is no better; my lord played upon it whilst he lived. Through its music my thoughts languished in love. No one has touched it since he died.'...

Plucking now with two fingers of the left hand, and now with the right, he renders very sweet melodies as he touches the strings, producing many variations with great distinctness...The harpists, who formerly had boldly struck the strings in minstrel fashion, listened silently and did not dare play.

The lady's daughter and Ruodlieb's nephew dance to Ruodlieb's harp playing. Passion runs through this musical episode, the music having cast its spell, after which they become quite smitten with each other.

Le dit de la harpe is a narrative poem that was not written as lyrics to be sung; *dit*, after all, means *spoken*. Like Machaut's other, much longer *dits*, this one is written in the first person, with the poet playing the part of the narrator and lover. The poem nods in the direction of courtly and chivalric poetry sung and played on the harp. The poet says in the first fifteen lines that he wishes to *harp* his lady this lay so that he may aptly compare her qualities to the harp. He then places himself in the tradition of notable personages who could be said to have played the harp, such as Orpheus, poet

and musician of love; Phoebus, god of music and poetry; and David, singer of Psalms to God. He describes the quality of each string as it pertains to the other strings and to his lady, and she to it.

But a musical performance of this poem is never possible to realize, because this poetry is in a narrative form of decasyllabic couplets and not meant to be set to music. The original manuscript (now at the Morgan Pierpont Library in New York City) is one of the most densely illuminated texts of all extant Machaut manuscripts. It is visual and book-oriented, rather than a musical score. The harp is conceptual, the lady is described in moral qualities and, although the image of the harp as the lady is that of the harp being cradled in the arms and played by the hands of the poet, the poem is not erotic, but more of a lecture on comportment. At the outset we have the image of a *trouvere* singing a lay to his lady and comparing her to his harp, and by the end the *trouvere* no longer sings in praise of any one person but instead sings in praise of love itself. The woman has become a moral allegory.

From the standpoint of programming *Le dit de la harpe* in a concert, it is interesting to note that lyric texts set to music by Guillaume de Machaut often speak of the same topics. For example, in the ballade *Honte, paour*, the qualities of *shame* and *fear of doing wrong* as well as *reason, measure, and honor* appear in much the same way as their corresponding parts in *Le dit de la harpe*. Another correlation can be found in the beginning of the poem, with which Machaut's ballade *Je puis trop bien comparer*, shares the opening line. Although the poem does not accommodate a completely musical recitation, the first eight lines can be sung to the music of this ballade.

Guillaume de Machaut's (c. 1300-1377) career as a cleric and canon, as well as a musician and poet, is well documented, in part by his own doing. Well-educated, he worked as secretary for King John I of Bohemia, and later for the Dukes of Berry in Reims. He was very deliberate about collecting, organizing, and saving his own manuscripts of music and poetry, which is why we have so many poems and musical compositions by him today.

The responsibilities of **Baude Cordier** (fl. c. 1380-1440), harpist in the court of Philip the Bold beginning in 1384, seem to the casual observer of history to require skills much like those of the figure of Ruodlieb in old French literature. He, along with the trumpet players, possessed a suit of armor to accompany the duke in battle. Also known as Baude Fresnel, he was authorized to buy at least seven harps between 1385 and 1394. One of these harps was worth half the price of a good horse or a third the price of a good house. In 1392, "*une grande harp double, ouvree bien richement de bois*" was purchased for him, and another was decorated with carvings and had gold tuning pins as well as four rows of strings.

Another harpist-composer of the 14th century was **Jacob Senleches** (fl. 1382-3). Working at the court of Castile in 1382, as indicated by the ballade *Fuions de ci* lamenting the death of Eleanor of Aragon, six months later he was employed by Pedro de Luna, Cardinal of Aragon, later to be Pope Benedict XIII. It is possible that Senleches moved to Avignon with Luna at that time, thereby finding himself in the company of many of the composers represented in the Chantilly Manuscript.

Our understanding of accompaniment when performing polyphonic vocal music from this period suffers from a lack of sources. The music sometimes lends itself to *intabulation*, arrangement of a piece for one or more instruments, often with ornamentation, such as the versions of vocal pieces found in the 15th century Faenza Codex. *De ce fol penser*, by **P. de Molins**, is an example. Testimony to the fact that this piece can be and was in fact played on the harp can be found in an image from a tapestry from the 1420s now in the Musée des Arts Decoratifs in Paris. It shows a female harpist reading from a music rotulus upon which is written *De ce que fol pense*. The music appears as random slashes, but the incipit is clear. In fact, the Faenza intabulation on tonight's program is very playable on the harp. For that matter, many of the pieces by harpist-composers Senleches and Cordier allow the harpist to play two parts at the same time, such as in *Belle, bonne, sage*, in which the contratenor and the tenor are playable by one hand and seem to be two rhythmic components of

one thought in the accompaniment. Likewise, the melismatic figures in Senleches' *La harpe de melodie* are also very easily played in the right hand on the harp, as if they were in fact composed on the harp.

--Christa Patton

About the performers

Dongmyung Ahn is a performer, educator, and scholar whose interests span the twelfth to eighteenth centuries. She studied baroque violin with Stanley Ritchie at Indiana University. Dongmyung is co-founder of Duo Custos and performs with Green Mountain Vespers, Pegasus, Raritan Players, The Sebastians, and TENET. She has played rebec in the *The Play of Daniel* at the Cloisters. A dedicated educator, Dongmyung has taught music history at New York University, Queens College, and Vassar College. She received her PhD in musicology at the Graduate Center, CUNY, and has published on medieval liturgy and Jewish-Christian relations in Henry VIII's court.

Deborah Fox is a lutenist with a span of repertoire ranging from medieval to baroque music, as a soloist, chamber music player, and baroque opera continuo. She has performed with the major early music ensembles and festivals from Newfoundland to Australia, including the Carmel Bach Festival, Glimmerglass Opera, Les Violons du Roy (Montreal), Spoleto Festival, Opera Atelier (Toronto), Pinchgut Opera (Sydney), Concert Royal (NY), Haymarket Opera and Third Coast Baroque (Chicago), and others. She graduated *cum laude* from Smith College, and received the Certificate of Advanced Studies in Early Music at London's Guildhall School, specializing in the improvised accompaniment practices of the baroque. Her teachers have included Paul O'Dette, Pat O'Brien, and Nigel North. She has been a Teaching Artist for the Aesthetic Education Institute. She is the founder and director of Pegasus Early Music in Rochester, NY, and the director of NYS Baroque in Ithaca and Syracuse, NY.

Ged Owen is originally from New Hampshire and graduated from Nazareth College with a BFA in Musical Theatre and a minor in Dance. During his Junior year, Ged performed in the Irene Ryan's Competition at ACTF as a partner to two nominees, getting into the Top 8 with one and earning the Best Partner Award. He had a chance to perform in the Rochester Irish Player's production of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* in an Irish Play Festival hosted in Listowel, Co. Kerry, Ireland. Ged was awarded Best Supporting Actor for his performance as **Edmund**. Other favorite credits include: **Gravedigger/Labourer** in Geva's *A Christmas Carol*, **Henry Bolingbroke** in The Company Theatre's *Richard II*, **Terrence the Blood Mage** in The Company Theatre's *Cell Outs*, **Enobarbus** in Rochester Community Players/The Company Theatre's *Antony and Cleopatra*, **Tybalt** in Red House Arts Center's *Romeo and Juliet*, **Macbeth** in Rochester Community Player's *Macbeth*, and **Petruchio** in Wallbyrd's *Taming of the Shrew*. Next, you can catch Ged as **Man 2** in JCC's touring show of *Survivors*.

Colombia native **Camila Parias** is a frequent soloist with the Boston Camerata. Parias, whose tone has been praised for its strength and clarity, also collaborates with ensembles such as La Donna Musicale, Skylark Ensemble, and Handel+Haydn Society. Her international appearances include performances in Europe of *Borrowed Light* with the Boston Camerata. She can be heard on Camerata's most recent CDs, *Free America!* and *A Medieval Christmas – Hodie Christus Natus Est*. Upcoming engagements include concerts with Pegasus, Upper Valley Baroque, and a performance at the Houston Early Music Festival. In addition, she will sing Belinda in *Dido and Aeneas* with Camerata, a role she has previously performed. Camila is particularly interested in early music of Spain and the New World. She recently introduced *Cantos y Suspiros*, an ongoing collaboration with harp and Baroque guitar/theorbo, which celebrates 17th century Spanish secular songs. In Bogota, she recorded selections of archival manuscripts belonging to that city's cathedral. She holds a B.M. in Vocal Performance from the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana of Bogota and a M.M. in Historical Performance from the Longy School of Music of Bard College.

Christa Patton, historical harpist and early wind specialist, has performed throughout the Americas, Europe, and Japan with many of today's premier early music ensembles including Piffaro the Renaissance Band, Early Music New York, Boston Camerata, The King's Noyse, Folger Consort, Newberry Consort, Apollo's Fire, Parthenia, ARTEK, and Chatham Baroque, to name a few. As a Baroque harpist specializing in 17th century opera, Christa has performed with New York City Opera, Wolf Trap Opera, Opera Atelier, and the Opera Theater of Saint Louis. As an educator and scholar, she has served on the faculty of Rutgers University and the Graduate Center at CUNY. She is also musical director of the Baroque Opera Workshop at Queens College, specializing in the works of early 17th century composers. In the recording industry, Christa has fulfilled the roles of both recording artist and producer.

Pegasus Early Music was formed in 2005. Our concerts encompass the spectrum of music played with attention to historical instruments and performance ideas: medieval, renaissance, baroque and classical music; vocal and instrumental, sacred and secular.

To our musicians, early music is a living art form, with its dynamic tradition of improvisation and innovation; its spirit of intense collaboration; its incredible ability to communicate sophisticated human instincts and emotions; and its chamber-style direct intimacy.

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Pegasus Early Music is a 501c3 non-profit arts organization.

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